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## TWO NEGRO TALES.

WHEN we were little children we went for part of every summer, or for the sugar-making season, to Avery's Island, our plantation home in southwestern Louisiana. I distinctly remember being one of a happy group seated in the long grass, on the west side of "Hymettus Hill," watching the shadows lengthen, as the last rays of the sun turned the marsh land into a sea of gold and tinged every little ripple on the bayou with flame. Seated in the midst of us, and speaking as with the voice of the Delphic oracle, was our young nurse, the daughter of Mammy Harriet, now grown too old to follow our restless feet. To Lizzie, and to us as well, the people and creatures she told of were as real as were those who moved about us, whose adventures and histories were less startling and eventful. Down behind the heavy belt of live-oak forest that skirted the bayou, which, from its tangle of undergrowth, we always called "the Jungle," and which was impenetrable to us, she built an imaginary habitation. This she peopled with a family who came up in boats from "the City," whose family name we never knew, and whose personal identity racked our young souls with keenest curiosity. The mysterious Miss Eliza and Master James were as familiar to us, though we never saw them, as were Mr. Silas Weggs's imaginary occupants of the old London house. Often, when some of the older boys would insist upon going behind Eagle Point and making the acquaintance of our neighbors, Lizzie would protest, and tell us that, though so pleasant and kind, they did not want visitors; but that, she having told them what nice children we were, they had promised to come up before daybreak and put something in the gully (ravine) for us. And sure enough, when she would send John Henry, her simple-minded young brother, to look, there would be a plate of "pulling candy," or tac-tac (popcorn ball), jumbles, or pralines, and our delight can better be imagined than described. If the older ones doubted, the doubt was not communicated to us, and our faith remained unshaken. Even now, though I have been on the bayou fishing beyond the belt of timber, I find myself picturing that terra incognita as I thought of it in those childish days. With such an imagination as our young nurse possessed, her fund of stories was endless; and I only wish I could recall more of them, though the two, of which this is a long prelude, I think are the only ones I have never seen published. I tell the stories in the language of our nurse, the language of a house servant, widely different from that of the field hands.

## I. MR. DEER'S MY RIDING HORSE.

Now, children, I'm tired tellin' you every even' 'bout Mr. Rabbit and the Tar-Baby over and over agin; I'll see ef I can't 'member a story Mammy used ter tell 'bout "Mr. Deer's my riding horse."

Well, onct upon a time, when Mr. Rabbit was young and frisky, he went a courting Miss Fox, who lived way far back in the thick woods. Mr. Fox an' his family was very skeery, an' they very seldom come outer the wood 'cep' for a little walk in the clearin' near the big house, sometimes when the moon shine bright; so they did n' know many people 'sides Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Deer. Mr. Deer he had his eyes set on Miss Fox, too. But he din' suspicion Mr. Rabbit was a lookin' that way, but kep' on being jus' as frenly with Mr. Rabbit as he ever been. One day Mr. Rabbit call on Miss Fox, and wile they was tawkin, Miss Fox she tells him what a fine gentleman she thinks Mr. Deer is. Mr. Rabbit jes threw back his head and he laf and he laf. "What you laffin 'bout?" Miss Fox says; and Mr. Rabbit he jes laf on an' wone tell her, an' Miss Fox she jes kep' on pestering Mr. Rabbit to tell her what he's laffin 'bout, an' at las' Mr. Rabbit stop laffin an' say, "Miss Fox, you bear me witness I did n' want to tell you, but you jes made me. Miss Fox, you call Mr. Deer a fine gentleman; Miss Fox, Mr. Deer is my riding horse!" Miss Fox she nearly fell over in a faintin' fit, and she say she done bleve it, and she will not till Mr. Rabbit give her the proof. An' Mr. Rabbit he says, "Will you bleve it ef you sees me riding pass yo' do'?" and Miss Fox says she will, and she wone have nothin' to do with Mr. Deer if the story is true. Now, Mr. Rabbit is ben fixing up a plan for some time to git Mr. Deer outer his way; so he says good even' to Miss Fox, and clips it off to Mr. Deer's house, and Mr. Rabbit he so frenly with Mr. Deer he done suspec' nothin'. Presently Mr. Rabbit jes fall over double in his cheer and groan and moan, and Mr. Deer he says, "What's the matter, Mr. Rabbit, is you sick?" But Mr. Rabbit he jes groan; then Mr. Rabbit fall off the cheer and roll on the floor, and Mr. Deer says, "What ails you, Mr. Rabbit, is you sick?" And Mr. Rabbit he jes groans out, "Oh, Mr. Deer, I'm dying; take me home, take me home." An' Mr. Deer he's mighty kinehearted, and he says, "Get up on my back, and I'll tote you home;" but Mr. Rabbit says, "Oh, Mr. Deer, I'm so sick, I can't set on your back 'less you put a saddle on." So Mr. Deer put on a saddle. Mr. Rabbit says, "I can't steady myself 'less you put my feet in the stirrups." So he put his feet in the stirrups. "Oh, Mr. Deer, I can't hold on 'less you put on a bridle." So he put on a bridle. "Oh, Mr.

Deer, I done feel all right 'less I had a whip in my hand." So Mr. Deer puts the whip in his hand. "Now I 'm ready, Mr. Deer," says Mr. Rabbit, "but go mighty easy, for I 'm likely to die any minute. Please take the short cut through the wood, Mr. Deer, so I kin get home soon." So Mr. Deer took the short cut, an' forgot that it took him pass Miss Fox's house. Jes as he 'membered it, an' was 'bout to turn back, Mr. Rabbit, who had slipped a pair of spurs on unbeknownst to him, stuck 'em into his sides, and at the same time laid the whip on so that po' Mr. Deer was crazy with the pain, and ran as fas' as his legs could carry him right by where Miss Fox was standin' on the gallery, and Mr. Rabbit a standin' up in his stirrups and hollerin', "Did n't I tell you Mr. Deer was my riding horse!" But after a while Miss Fox she found out 'bout Mr. Rabbit's trick on Mr. Deer, and she would n't have nothin' more to do with him.

## II. TROUBLE, TROUBLE, BRER ALLIGATOR!

Everybody knows what a mischievous little varmint Mr. Rabbit is, but everybody done know how near he come once to bein' burned up and drowned with his foolishness. Mr. Rabbit and his family always did live in a blackberry patch down on the aige of the big wood, and they mighty seldom come near the clearin', because they didn' like to hear old marster's houns a-barkin'; but one day, wen they was a dry drought, Mr. Rabbit 'lowed he would go down to the bayou and cool his feets off in the water. Wen he got there he found the tide done all run out, so there was n' more water than he could jump ercross; so he thought ez he never been over on the marsh islands he would take a little broad and see ef he liked it over there. Now, tho' Mr. Rabbit had never been over on the marsh island befo', many is the time he is ben down along the bayou in the marsh gress, and, whenever he cum across er alligator's nes', did n' he jes scratch the aigs out fur pure meanness, an' leave 'em layin' around to spile.

You children knows how Mr. Alligator fills his nes' with mud, and lines it all with grass, and puts the aigs all in as regular es ef foks had did it. Well, wen Mr. Alligator would come and fine out wat Mr. Rabbit done, he would promise hisself to get even with Mr. Rabbit some day, and he would lay up on the mud flat waitin' fur a school of mullets, and all the time he was a waitin' fur Mr. Rabbit, too.

Mr. Rabbit, wen he lipt across the little stream of water, where the bayou mos' in generally was, he was mightily skeered because the mud was sof' and he nearly got bogged, but wen his feets touched the marsh grass he forgot all about bein' skeered, he was

so pleased with the new country he think he done a found. Man, sir ! but if he did n' clip it throu' that grass and skeer the marsh hens offen there nesses, and make the blackbird hop higher on the rushes ! How did the' known it was n' er wildcat ?

Yo Granpa an' many mo' hunter ust ter go over on that very same island to hunt Mr. Deer, en for that reason the folkes give it the name of Deer Island.

Well, sir, wile Mr. Rabbit was 'musin' hisself an' running 'roun' way over in the middle of the island, treackly he stopped and prick up his years and listened, an' sich a barkin' as they was an' sich a crackling, you never heard the like. Mr. Rabbit, he knowed wat it was in er minit ; the hunters had set the marsh afire to hunt Mr. Deer. Then you better bleve me, Mr. Rabbit was skeered ; he runned an' he runned till he come to the bayou on the other side, then he jus' loped along the aige, hopin' he might fine some way er getting over, but the tide had rized an' the bayou was full, an' there he was caught 'tween the dogs, the fire, and the water.

'Bout this time Mr. Alligator come a-sailing along from where he had ben teaching his young ones to swim, an' soon as Mr. Rabbit ketched sight of him he jes stan on his hine legs and holler, "Trouble ! Brer Alligator, trouble !" But Mr. Alligator winked his eye and sailed on. Mr. Rabbit he kep' on hollerin, "Trouble, Brer Alligator," till presenly Mr. Alligator turned 'roun' and wen he seen the big smoke and heard the marsh a cracklin', he thought now he had a chance to get even with Mr. Rabbit. So he sailed up a little nearer, an' by that time the fire was gainin' on Mr. Rabbit, an' he was jest er prancin' long the aige er the water er beggin' Mr. Alligator to take him on his back 'cross the bayo. But "No," says Mr. Alligator, "you is the one ez always scratches the aigs outer we-alls nesses. No, sir, Mr. Rabbit, you kin stay here an' burn up or git eat up by dogs, for all I care."

Still the fire come nearer an' the houn' bark louder, and Mr. Rabbit keep on hollerin', "Trouble, Brer Alligator, trouble ! Brer Alligator, ef you jes take me off, I promise I wont 'stroy yo' nesses no mo', en I'll give you every las' chile I got ;" and yet the fire creep closer, an' Mr. Rabbit's little stumpy tail is in danger of gettin' scorched, an' Mr. Alligator sails near the bank and calls to Mr. Rabbit to jump on. Now, wen Mr. Alligator got in the middle of the bayou he considered how foolish he was not to let Mr. Rabbit stay where he was and git 'stroyed, but he could git even with him yit, an' he commenced sinkin' very slow. Mr. Rabbit he foun' the water risin' on him, an he hollered out, "Trouble, Brer Alligator, my feets is gittin' wet." "Clime on my neck," den sez Mr. Alligator. So he clime on his neck, an' Mr. Alligator kep

on sinkin. "Trouble, Brer Alligator, the water is gainin' on me," hollers Mr. Rabbit. But jes then he sees Mr. Alligator is sailed so near to the other bank, and done forgot how far Mr. Rabbit kin jump: he jes ris on his hine legs an' clears the water, an' is back in his brier patch er thinkin' up mo' mischief befo' po' slow old Brer Alligator known he's gorn.

*Mrs. William Preston Johnston.*

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